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ABSTRACT

The challenge of making educational programs accessible to people with disabilities, combined with the increasing emphasis on testing and other forms of assessment, has translated into a need for accommodations in the testing and assessment of people with disabilities. Typically, test accommodations are provided for people with sensory and/or physical impairments, but there is less agreement about test accommodations for people with learning disabilities and other less visible disabilities. Making decisions about test accommodations is challenging because changing testing procedures or materials may change the technical adequacy of a test. Characteristics of technical adequacy include test reliability, accuracy in making predictions about test takers, and test validity. Accommodations allowed in national and state assessment programs are inconsistent, involving widespread variation in practice. A comprehensive set of guidelines is needed that state and national agencies can use in decision making. Guidelines for making decisions about accommodations need to address: inclusion and exclusion criteria, when and how to modify tests or testing procedures, how to report scores, and how to summarize data. Identifying accommodations that are both fair and technically adequate requires a delicate balancing of individual and societal rights. Contains two references. (JDD)

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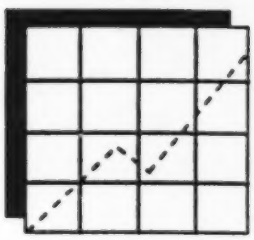
ED 373 504

Accommodating Students with Disabilities in National and State Testing Programs



BRIEF REPORT
9

National Center on Educational Outcomes

The College of Education
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

August, 1993

EC 303273

"Accommodations" in Grade 2 Braille

As American schools and workplaces strive to provide opportunities for all Americans, they confront the challenge of making their buildings and programs accessible to people with disabilities. At the same time, demands for accountability have grown, resulting in an increase in testing to insure that students are learning and that workplaces and institutions of higher learning select qualified candidates to fill limited numbers of positions. This increased emphasis on testing and other forms of assessment translates into a need for accommodations in the testing and assessment of people with disabilities.

The Challenge of Accommodations in Assessment

More and more people are aware of the importance of providing testing modifications. Still, there is not yet consensus about when, how, or what to modify. Typically, test accommodations are provided for people with sensory and/or physical impairments. These include:

- Braille editions
- Large-print versions
- Use of sign language for giving directions
- Someone to record responses

There is less agreement about test accommodations for people with learning disabilities and other less visible disabilities.

Making decisions about test accommodations is challenging because changing testing procedures or materials may change the technical adequacy of a test. Characteristics of technical adequacy that traditionally are considered to be the foundations of good assessments include the:

- Reliability of the test
- Accuracy in making predictions about test takers
- Meaning or validity of test scores

Inconsistency Exists in Allowed Accommodations

Accommodations allowed in national and state assessment programs are inconsistent. State assessment programs illustrate the current lack of consensus about appropriate accommodations. Some states allow absolutely no accommodations. Other states allow almost every accommodation imaginable. Some states allow accommodations that are expressly prohibited in other states. Even in the same state, different accommodations are allowed for different tests. The only generalization one can make is that there is widespread variation in practice.

Guidelines Needed

The task confronting us now is to develop a comprehensive set of guidelines that state and national agencies can use in decision making. If we do not come to some agreement, we can expect one or more of the following scenarios:

- There will continue to be confusion over policies, scores, and interpretation of the data.
- The trend toward modifying tests and testing procedures may be carried to absurdity. The number and nature of requests may become overwhelming.
- Litigation will increase.

Guidelines for making decisions about accommodations need to address:

- ✓ Inclusion and exclusion criteria
- ✓ When to modify tests or testing procedures
- ✓ How to modify tests or testing procedures
- ✓ How to report scores
- ✓ How to summarize data

We need guidelines that are fair to people with disabilities. At the same time, modifications allowed through these guidelines need to protect a reasonable degree of test integrity. Identifying accommodations that are both fair and technically adequate requires a delicate balancing of individual and societal rights.

Information Sources

Thurlow, M. L., Ysseldyke, J. E., & Silverstein, B. (1993). Testing accommodations for students with disabilities: A review of the literature (Synthesis Report 4). Minneapolis, MN: National Center on Educational Outcomes, University of Minnesota.

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The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) was established in October, 1990 to work with state departments of education, national policy-making groups, and others to facilitate and enrich the development and use of indicators of educational outcomes for students with disabilities. The Center represents a collaborative effort of the University of Minnesota, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, and St. Cloud State University. The Center is supported through a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (H159C00004). Opinions or points of view do not necessarily represent those of the U.S. Department of Education or Offices within it.

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